

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
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FM AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8731
INFO AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY OSLO
CINCEUR VAIHINGEN GE
CINCLANT NORFOLK VA
COMICEDEFOR KEFLAVIK IC
USMISSION USNATO

C O N F I D E N T I A L REYKJAVIK 1232

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, IC
SUBJECT: US-ICELAND RELATIONS: COMMENTS BY PRIME MINISTER AND
FOREIGN MINISTER

SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER JOHANNESSEN AND FOREIGN MINISTER
GRONDAL ASSURED ME IN CALLS ON THEM TODAY THAT NEW GOVERNMENT
OF ICELAND REMAINS FIRMLY COMMITTED TO MEMBERSHIP IN NATO,
PRESENCE OF ICELAND DEFENSE FORCE, AND TO COOPERATION WITH
UNITED STATES.

1. I PAID INITIAL COURTESY CALLS ON NEWLY-APPOINTED PRIME
MINISTER OLAFUR JOHANNESSEN AND FOREIGN MINISTER BENEDIKT
GRONDAL TODAY. PURPOSE OF CALLS WAS TO CONGRATULATE THEM
ON THEIR NEW RESPONSIBILITIES AND TO ASSURE THEM OF CONTINUING
DESIRE OF EMBASSY TO COOPERATE FULLY IN STRENGTHENING
TRADITIONALLY FRIENDLY US-ICELANDIC RELATIONS. I ALSO
USED OCCASION OF CALLS TO RAISE WITH PRIME MINISTER AND
FOREIGN MINISTER TIMING OF ARRIVAL OF US TECHNICAL TEAM
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FOR DISCUSSIONS IN CONNECTION WITH JOINT-USE AIR
TERMINAL (SEPTTEL).

2. FOREIGN MINISTER GRONDAL, ON WHOM I CALLED FIRST,
STATED THAT FORMATION OF NEW GOVERNMENT HAD NOT BEEN
EASY PRIMARILY BECAUSE OF UNWILLINGNESS OF PEOPLE'S
ALLIANCE OR OF SOCIAL DEMOCRATS TO CONCEDE PRIME MINISTER-

SHIP TO THE OTHER. AGREEMENT TO FORM GOVERNMENT REFLECTED GROWING POPULAR CRITICISM OVER FAILURE OF PARTIES TO COME TOGETHER. DIFFERENCES AMONG THEM, HOWEVER, REMAIN PROFOUND AND THERE IS ALREADY EXPECTATION THAT NEW GOVERNMENT WILL NOT LAST LONG. FOREIGN MINISTER NOTED THAT THIS WAS "FIRST TIME" PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE HAD ENTERED GOVERNMENT WITHOUT WINNING ANY CONCESSIONS IN FOREIGN POLICY AREA. HE THEN STATED THAT NEW ICELANDIC GOVERNMENT REMAINS FIRMLY COMMITTED TO ICELAND'S MEMBERSHIP IN NATO AND TO CONTINUED PRESENCE OF ICELAND DEFENSE FORCE. HE DECLARED THAT THERE WOULD BE NO CONCESSIONS ON EITHER OF THESE POINTS BY SOCIAL DEMOCRATS DESPITE WHAT HE EXPECTED TO BE CONTINUING PRESSURE FROM PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE (PARTICULARLY FROM ITS ALTHING DELEGATION) FOR CHANGES IN ICELAND'S RELATIONSHIP TO NATO. GRONDAL EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT HE WOULD HAVE FULL SUPPORT OF PRIME MINISTER JOHANNESSEN IN THIS AREA.

3. PRIME MINISTER JOHANNESSEN CONFIRMED THIS TO ME WHEN I CALLED ON HIM LATER SAME DAY. AFTER ACCEPTING MY CONGRATULATIONS ON HIS RETURN TO PRIME MINISTERSHIP AND MY BEST WISHES FOR HIS SUCCESS IN HIS OFFICE, JOHANNESSEN SMILED WRYLY, AS IS HIS WONT, AND SAID THAT HE HAD NEITHER EXPECTED NOR WANTED TO RETURN TO HIS PRESENT POSITION. HE HAD, INSTEAD, LOOKED FORWARD TO RESUMING HIS PROFESSORSHIP OF LAW AT NATIONAL UNIVERSITY. HOWEVER, CONFIDENTIAL

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EVENTS HAD WORKED OUT OTHERWISE, AND HE NOW FOUND HIMSELF WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR TRYING TO SOLVE COUNTRY'S SERIOUS ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. AS DID GRONDAL EARLIER, HE EXPRESSED SOME DOUBT ABOUT HOW LONG PRESENT GOVERNMENT WOULD SURVIVE IN ITS EFFORTS, BUT HE SAID THAT IT WOULD DO ITS BEST.

4. PRIME MINISTER THEN SAID THAT HE WANTED TO ASSURE ME THAT ICELAND'S RELATIONS WITH NATO AND WITH ITS "BIG NEIGHBOR", THE UNITED STATES, WOULD REMAIN UNCHANGED. HE DESCRIBED HIMSELF AS STRONG SUPPORTER OF NATO, AND HE ADDED THAT HE VALUED QTE EVEN MORE UNQTE AND RECOGNIZED IMPORTANCE OF ICELAND'S RELATIONSHIP TO US. HE SAID HE HOPED HE HAD MADE HIS VIEWS ON THESE MATTERS CLEAR IN THE PAST BUT WANTED TO BE CERTAIN THAT THERE WAS NO DOUBT REGARDING THEM NOW.

5. I EXPRESSED GRATIFICATION TO PRIME MINISTER FOR ASSURANCES HE HAD GIVEN ME AND SAID I HOPED HE WOULD LOOK ON US NOT ONLY AS "BIG NEIGHBOR" BUT ALSO AS "GOOD PARTNER". I CONCLUDED BY ASSURING HIM THAT USG WISHED HIM WELL IN HIS EFFORTS AND THAT EMBASSY WOULD ALWAYS BE AVAILABLE TO DISCUSS IN TRADITIONAL SPIRIT OF FRIENDSHIP

AND COOPERATION MATTERS OF MUTUAL INTEREST TO ICELAND
AND US.
BLAKE

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